



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

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CROSS BORDER ROADS
BACKGROUND NOTE

General

There are 291 recognised border crossing points, including all major and minor public roads, private roads and some tracks across the border not capable of being used by vehicles.

101 crossing points have been officially closed off by the Northern Ireland security forces. In many instances closed crossings are negotiable on foot or by farm machinery or have been reopened unofficially by local people. The latter are subsequently reclosed by the security forces but there have been no new closures in recent years.

Details on a County basis are as follows:

County	Total No. of Crossings	No of Blocked Crossings
Donegal	93	44
Leitrim	10	10
Cavan	21	9
Monaghan	134	41
Louth	33	1

Level of representations on a county basis

Donegal: Many of the closed crossings are in remote mountain areas and there has been relatively little pressure from public representatives in Co Donegal to have roads reopened apart from some minor roads which have inconvenienced local farmers rather than the population at large.

(Strabane District Council recently passed a resolution calling

for more road closures on the Donegal/Tyrone border in the wake of recent IRA bomb attacks on Strabane and Sion Mills and the murder of Olven Kilpatrick in Castlederg. The Chairman of Strabane District Council, Mr. Edward Turner (OUP), called to the Department on 26 January, 1990, to discuss the security situation on the Donegal/Tyrone border and in particular Castlederg where there have been 20 murders since 1969.)

Leitrim: The six passable crossings in Co Leitrim are all closed with the result that people wishing to travel to the North from Leitrim must travel through either Blacklion in Co Cavan or via Co. Donegal. This can involve a 26 mile detour to a destination only one mile away. The Tanaiste received a deputation from Leitrim Co Council in 1988 which pressed very strongly for the reopening of at least one road - Cashel Bridge near Kiltyclogher. The Gardai have indicated that they there are at present no crossings open between Leitrim and Fermanagh and there are constant representations and PQs from public representatives. Cashel Bridge was the subject of a specific approach in December, 1985 during which it became clear that the Gardai opposed its reopening as much as the British. Dooard or County Bridge on the road between Rosinver and Garrison is also raised as a candidate for reopening but the Gardai share the British reluctance to reopen it. Tourism interests in Fermanagh and Leitrim have pressed strongly for the reopening of the Dooard crossing, because it affords the easiest access to the Fermanagh/Leitrim lake district from the south west.

The other four crossings are not negotiable by vehicle in any event.

Cavan: Aghalane bridge on the National Primary Route N3 between Belturbet and Enniskillen has generated more representations in favour of reopening than any other closed crossing. The pressure to reopen this road continues to grow now that there is the prospect of reopening the Ballinamore/ Ballyconnell canal. The Gardai are opposed on the grounds that it would facilitate Republican attacks in the North and Loyalist attacks in the

South. (The bridge was blown up by terrorists in 1972 and Loyalists were responsible for an explosion in Belturbet in 1973).

Monaghan: There has been a lot of pressure to reopen Lacky Bridge near Clones and recent attempts by the local community to reopen the bridge led to three arrests. It was closed in June 1980 and is now open to pedestrian traffic only. The British Army removed a permanent checkpoint from the other side of the bridge in July, 1989. The British have cited security grounds in their refusal to reopen and have made it clear that they will not reconsider this decision in the absence of a Garda/Army checkpoint on our side. Both the Gardai and the Army are opposed in principle to static checkpoints which they consider to be a wasteful use of resources.

In recent months the "North Monaghan South Tyrone Community Association" has reopened a number of minor roads between Emyvale and Clogher, Co. Tyrone. The British have indicated that they do not, at the moment, plan to reclose one of these crossings which is located at Drumfurrer (BCP 108). There are two other reopened crossings in that area Greagh (BCP 106) and McMeel's which are still open, and which according to Fr. Dawson the PP of Clogher, Co. Tyrone, are extremely popular with the local community who have had to endure twenty years of major inconvenience as a result of the closures. The reopened roads are very popular with the local community and they are hoping that they will be left open. As a result of our raising the problems faced by this particular area in the Secretariat, the British Army civilian representative has met with Fr. Dawson to discuss the situation. Fr. Dawson was pleased with the meeting and very appreciative of our part in bringing it about.

An attempt to reopen Ballagh Bridge (BCP 98) on 13 January, 1990, led to an incident involving the RUC and some elements of the crowd and allegations that a plastic bullet fired by the RUC injured a youth (Kevin Connolly) from Augher, Co. Tyrone who was on the southern side of the bridge at the time. We have raised

the incident in the Secretariat. The Gardai's reports have not turned up conclusive evidence that Connolly's injuries were caused by a plastic bullet.

Some sources have suggested that the RUC have no guidelines on how to deal with unofficial attempts to reopen border crossings and hence the different approaches from area to area. The matter may also be complicated by the fact that the Emergency Provisions Act does not make it an offence for people to build roads around closed crossings, whereas it is an offence to interfere with or try to remove obstacles placed on a roadway by the security forces. The Secretary of State has indicated that this issue is being examined with a view to introducing an amendment to the EPA.

Repairs are almost complete on Moy Bridge, on the main Dublin-Derry road, which was damaged by an IRA bomb in July 1989, and was the subject of a further bomb attack (defused) in September 1989.

Louth: Co. Louth has been least affected by road closures. Despite the attempted reopening of a minor road near Kilnasaggart on 19 November which led to the arrests of eight people there has been very little agitation to have this road reopened.

Department's Policy

The Department generally favours the reopening of cross border roads (security considerations permitting) because of the hardship and inconvenience caused to communities on both sides of the border and the cross-border economic and social activity which has been choked off because of the closures.

Cases Deserving of Special Pleading

The roads which have been the subject of the heaviest lobbying to the Minister and the Department and which have been raised most frequently through the Secretariat are as follows:

1. Aghalane Bridge on National Primary Route N3 between Belturbet and Enniskillen;
2. Cashel Bridge, near Kiltyclogher, Co Leitrim;
3. Dooard or County Bridge between Rosinver in Co Leitrim and Garrison, Co Fermanagh;
4. Lacky Bridge, near Clones, Co Monaghan.

Economic and Social Considerations

Aghalane Bridge merits priority treatment given that its closure obstructs a National Primary route (which would probably take over 700 cars a day according to the Gardai) and cuts the town of Belturbet off from its natural hinterland in Co. Fermanagh. The reopening of the Ballinamore/Ballyconnell canal would fail to realise its maximum potential if this road were to remain closed.

County Leitrim must also be regarded as a priority given that there is no crossing open in the entire county and the undoubtedly negative effects which the closed border has had on the local economy. As mentioned, a detour of up to 26 miles can be necessary to travel between two places a mile apart.

The town of Clones which is almost completely encircled by the border has suffered serious economic disruption and any measure which would help to alleviate those problems, such as the reopening of Lacky Bridge, deserve sympathetic consideration. See supplemental note on Clones in the Annex.

Security Considerations

Prior to the last Conference in March the Garda, while generally against reopening closed roads, indicated that they would not see any major security problem if the following four crossings were re-opened [though in one case this would be conditional on increased manpower]: No 191 at Kiltyclogher which would provide a crossing from Co Leitrim into Co Fermanagh; No 235 at Meenagolan which would provide a crossing from Co Donegal into Co Tyrone; No

238 at Carnhill which would provide a crossing from Co Donegal to Co Tyrone; and No 312 at Mullagood which would provide a crossing from Co Donegal to Co Fermanagh.

The March Conference asked the Chief Constable and the Commissioner to look at the possibility of reopening some cross border roads. This work has begun and is continuing.

J Farrell
Anglo-Irish Section

February 1990.

Closed Cross-Border Roads in the Clones Area.

The following Border Crossing Points in the Clones area are closed:

BCP 124	Aghafin, on most direct route from Clones to Roslea.	Cratered	Reopened unofficially on 12.11.89 and re-closed on 14.04.90. <u>Plastic Bullets were fired and one man from Co. Fermanagh was arrested at this checkpoint on 13.4.90.</u>
BCP 127	Benson's Bridge	Caissoned	Re-opened unofficially on 8.4.90.
BCP 128	Priest's Bridge	Caissoned	Attempted re-opening on 8.4.90.
BCP 129	Lackey Bridge	Caissoned	reopened unofficially on 10.12.89 and again on 8.4.90.
BCP 137	Lisanroe No. 2 (aka Clonatty Br)	Caissoned 12/12/88	
BCP 140	Munnilly Bridge	Blown up	
BCP 171	Aghalane Bridge.	Blown up	The Taoiseach recently said that he supports the re-opening of this bridge.

The Northern Ireland Security forces have indicated that they will move in to remove a makeshift bridge at Lackey Bridge and to reclose the unofficially re-opened crossings at Priest's Bridge and Benson's Bridge on 19 and 20 April. They re-closed two other unofficially re-opened crossings at Kilanny and Drumfurrer (near Roslea) on 18 April. The re-closure of the Drumfurrer crossing is expected to cause a very negative reaction locally.

Arguments in favour of re-opening closed crossings in the Clones area:

Many arguments in favour of reopening closed crossings in the Clones area have been made by public representatives over the years and these can be summarised as follows:

- Since the roads around Clones were closed the town, already at a competitive disadvantage with nearby towns in Northern Ireland, has declined dramatically as an economic and social centre as a result of the choking off of its Northern hinterland;
- The majority of local people on both sides of the border are overwhelmingly in favour of reopening these crossings;
- The local community feels that the closures have had no discernible impact on the IRA's activities and they achieve nothing that other appropriate security measures could achieve;
- The negative impact which the continued closures are having on the attitudes of the local community and the manner in which the IRA/Sinn Fein is exploiting the situation;

The Gardai in a recent assessment (Report dated 26 February, 1990) have indicated that for security and policing reasons they would not be in favour of re-opening any roads in the Clones area, but they would not object to the re-opening of one crossing in Co. Leitrim (Kiltyclogher) and three crossings in Co. Donegal: Meenagolan, Carnhill and Mullagood.